

CHAPTER 3

Developing the Alternatives

The I-405 Corridor Program Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) analyzed a wide range of alternatives and travel modes for moving people and freight, reducing congestion in the corridor, as well as mitigation measures to avoid or reduce adverse effects.

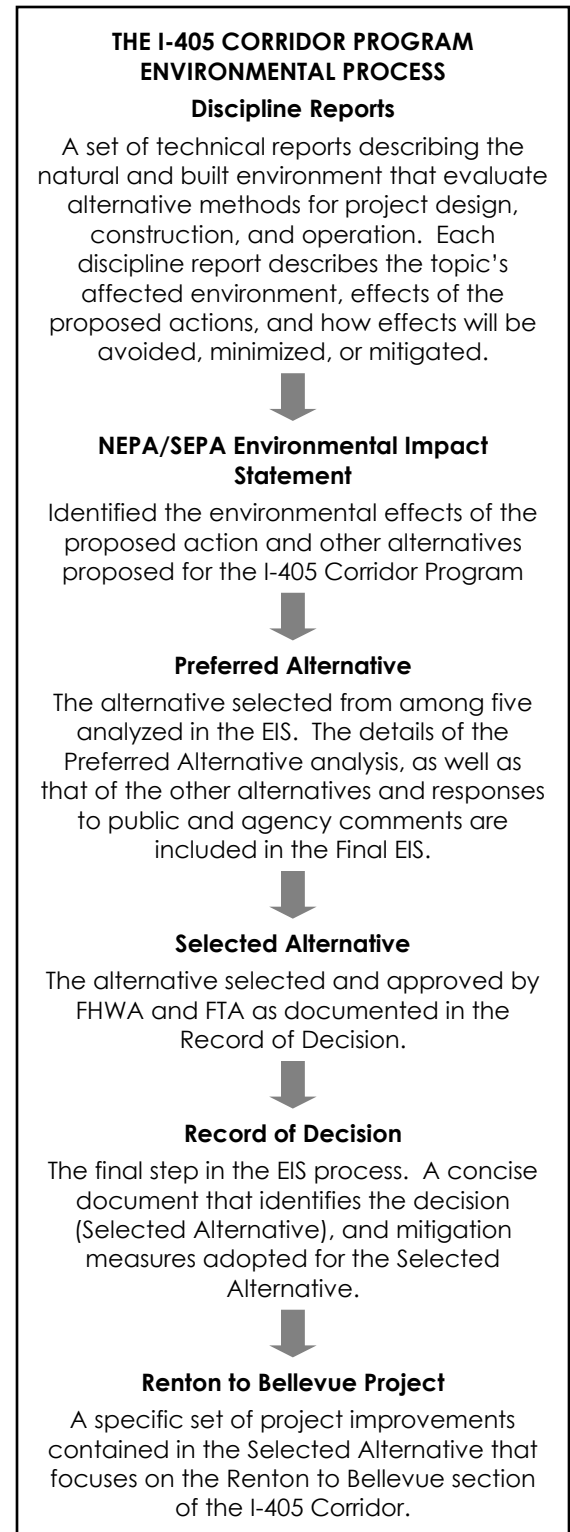
The Renton to Bellevue Project extends along I-405 for approximately 8 miles (milepost 3.8 to milepost 11.9) from SR 169 through the northern on- and off-ramps of the I-90 interchange. This environmental assessment is a focused, project-specific environmental review of two alternatives—the Build Alternative and the No Build Alternative.

How did WSDOT move forward from the I-405 Corridor Program to the Renton to Bellevue Project?

In the I-405 Corridor Program Draft EIS, decision-makers considered various modes of travel for making improvements within the corridor. The range of options evaluated included general-purpose travel, carpools, transit, and rail; general locations for improvements; and how combinations of improvements could work together as a comprehensive system. The I-405 Corridor Program environmental process, shown at the right, shows the milestones that we have achieved.

Preferred Alternative

Once we completed the Draft EIS, we recommended a *Preferred Alternative* for analysis in the Final EIS. The *Preferred Alternative* was a compilation of highway, transit, local arterial, and other improvements within the 30-mile stretch of the I-405 Corridor and immediate vicinity. The details of the *Preferred Alternative* were



included in the Final EIS, along with the analyses of five other alternatives.

Selected Alternative

With some modifications, the *Preferred Alternative* in the Final EIS became the *Selected Alternative* in the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Record of Decision (ROD). The ROD identified the basis for the decision to advance the *Selected Alternative*, and explained the adopted means to avoid, minimize, and compensate for environmental effects.

In both the EIS and the ROD, WSDOT specified that the improvements cited in the *Selected Alternative* would be re-examined prior to implementation to determine the best combinations for phased construction. WSDOT continues to examine these recommendations within the constraints of the available budget while maintaining sound engineering design.

It is expected to take 20 years or more to implement the *Selected Alternative* for the entire I-405 Corridor Program. As a result of the 2005 Transportation Partnership Account passed by the Legislature, the I-405 Corridor Program received \$972 million in state funds to construct highway improvements addressing congestion chokepoints in Tukwila, Renton, Bellevue, Kirkland, and Bothell. Combined with the \$485 million in the 2003 Nickel funding package, this new revenue will help to improve mobility to an even larger extent through the I-405 Corridor.

How was the Renton to Bellevue Project developed?

Using the *Selected Alternative* as the master plan, WSDOT developed congestion relief roadway improvements and began to define the Renton to Bellevue Project with the following features in mind:

- Improving the worst congestion choke points¹ along I-405;
- Reconstructing and reconfiguring eight interchanges;
- Improving safety;
- Increasing travel speeds during peak commuter hours;

¹ An area of highway with inadequate capacity or a point or area of traffic congestion.

- Facilitating freight movement;
- Implementing meaningful environmental improvements; and
- Providing a return benefit of several times the investment costs through reduced travel time, and increased freight speeds.

Throughout the planning process, WSDOT incorporated many revisions into the project. For example, WSDOT added two lanes in each direction throughout this section of roadway to provide traffic relief for one of the corridor's worst bottlenecks. Additionally, we conducted reviews to ensure that methods to avoid or minimize potential effects were evaluated and incorporated into the project. The environmental review process for the Renton to Bellevue Project will be completed in three primary stages (shown to the right).

In 2003, the City of Renton partnered with WSDOT to keep the Renton to Bellevue Project moving forward by designating a \$5-million federal grant award for this section of the I-405 Corridor. The grant funding allowed footprint engineering and the environmental studies to begin.

What alternatives are studied in this Environmental Assessment?

WSDOT evaluates two alternatives in this EA:

- A **No Build Alternative**, which would maintain the status quo, meaning only routine activities such as road maintenance, repair, and minor safety improvements necessary for continued operations of the existing I-405 facility would take place over the next 20 years. This alternative does not include improvements that would increase roadway capacity on I-405, reduce congestion, or improve safety. Therefore, the No Build Alternative does not satisfy the project's purpose.
- A **Build Alternative**, which will add two northbound and two southbound lanes to the Renton to Bellevue section from SR 169 to I-90; realign sections of I-405 to bring it up to current freeway standards; construct a new in-line bus rapid transit (BRT) station at 112th Avenue SE; construct a high-occupancy vehicle (HOV)

THE RENTON TO BELLEVUE PROJECT ENVIRONMENTAL PROCESS

Discipline Reports

Each of the 21 discipline reports describes the topic's affected environment, effects of the proposed action, and how effects will be avoided, minimized, or mitigated.



Environmental Assessment

A concise document prepared in compliance with NEPA that briefly discusses the purpose and need for an action, alternatives to the action, and provides sufficient evidence and analysis of impacts to determine whether to prepare an EIS or a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI).



F O N S I

A FONSI presents the reasons why an action will not have a significant effect on the environment and, therefore, does not require the preparation of an EIS. Based on analyses and project feedback received to date, we anticipate preparing a FONSI for the Renton to Bellevue Project.

direct-access ramp at North 8th Street; realign and reconfigure eight interchanges; improve stormwater treatment; and make improvements to local roadways.

The description of the Build Alternative is presented in Chapter 4. A more detailed project description is found in Appendix A.

What environmental issues influenced project design?

Throughout the development of the Renton to Bellevue Project, WSDOT continues to identify design refinements to avoid or minimize effects to the environment. For example, proposed construction and stormwater treatment areas have been modified several times to limit contact with streams and wetlands. In some situations, retaining walls around culverts (headwalls) will be installed on culverts to avoid encroachment into streams and surrounding areas.

What is the objective of this Environmental Assessment?

This EA offers a detailed evaluation of the effects that can occur as a result of this project. Using this evaluation, FHWA and WSDOT will determine whether an EIS or a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) will be prepared. The EA does not re-examine corridor-level alternatives, effects, or other measures that were already analyzed and resolved in the Corridor Program EIS.

How has the public been involved?

WSDOT has involved the public in the Renton to Bellevue Project through a wide range of activities such as:

- Inviting citizens to participate in the project scoping and development process;
- Conducting public open houses, producing newsletters with project information, presentations at neighborhood meetings, etc.;
- Providing other outreach efforts such as Executive, Steering, and Advisory committee meetings;
- Responding to individual correspondence by telephone, email, and in person;
- Holding a discipline report meeting to present preliminary findings; and



***Project scoping meeting
September 17, 2003***

The purpose of scoping is to:

- Inform the public and agencies of proposed actions and alternatives;
- Serve as a forum to gather comments to help identify potential environmental effects;
- Ensure that the environmental documents consider reasonable alternatives; and
- Help identify issues or concerns important to the local community and to agencies.

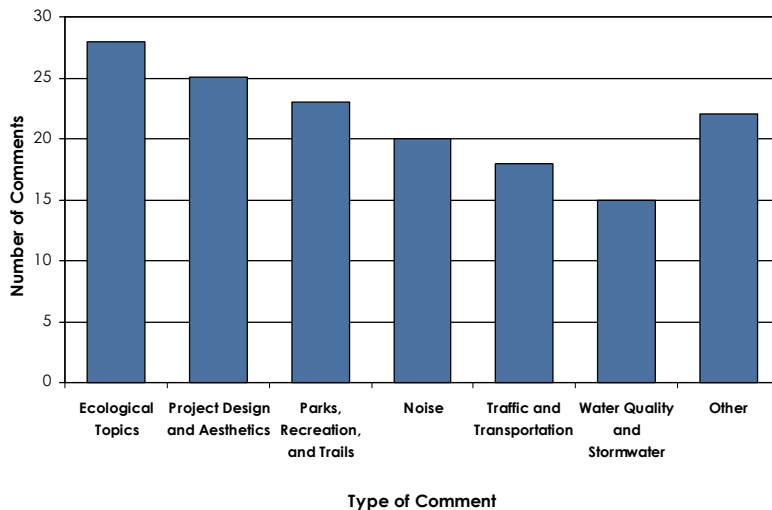
- Holding a public meeting and hearing on this environmental assessment.

Project Scoping and Development

On August 22, 2003, WSDOT met with cities and agencies that have jurisdiction in the project area to identify and incorporate their concerns and comments. More than 75 citizens attended the Renton to Bellevue Project scoping meeting on September 17, 2003. They were invited to submit written and verbal comments to WSDOT during a public comment period.

Following these meetings, WSDOT categorized and compiled the comments into the Renton to Bellevue Project Scoping Report. The comments addressed topics such as noise, parks, water quality, stormwater management, and the purpose and need for the project (see Exhibit 3-1). Throughout the environmental assessment process, WSDOT has actively communicated with citizens through letters, emails, in-person meetings, and phone conversations.

Exhibit 3-1: Public scoping comments



Public Outreach

Public outreach for the Renton to Bellevue Project has been ongoing since 1999, when scoping for the I-405 Corridor Program EIS began. The corridor public involvement program included a large (40 members) community advisory committee (I-405 Corridor Program Citizens Committee) representing a wide range of interests and backgrounds throughout the corridor, a media outreach program, public meetings, project

Renton to Bellevue Project Outreach

Renton to Bellevue Charette:
August 19, 2002

Scoping Meeting with Resource Agencies and Jurisdictions:
August 22, 2003

Public Scoping and Open House:
September 17, 2003

Neighborhood Meetings:
Ongoing

Renton to Bellevue Project Open House
December 8, 2005

EA Public Hearing
March 22, 2006

newsletters, electronic newsletters, a project web site, and a speakers bureau to make presentations to the large number of community organizations in the corridor.

WSDOT developed a public involvement plan to support the Renton to Bellevue EA, with goals to:

- Support the successful delivery of the project;
- Communicate with the public about the mobility, economic, and environmental benefits of the project;
- Identify and address any disproportionately high and adverse impacts on minority, low-income and non-English-speaking populations;
- Provide construction information;
- Reinforce positive relationships with other agencies, individuals, and groups; and
- Communicate the need, vision, and context for the project.

In early 2004, preparation of the Renton to Bellevue EA was temporarily put on hold as the project team turned its focus to completing the funded “Nickel Project” EAs in Kirkland, Bellevue, and Renton. During this time, some of the targeted outreach slowed down as well. The Renton to Bellevue Project engineering team continued to work toward completing the project’s preliminary design, and the public involvement team maintained contact with area residents through phone calls, email correspondence, and neighborhood meetings.

In March of 2005, the Renton to Bellevue Project was restarted. With the project’s renewed schedule, the project team visited more neighborhoods in 2005. A major concern for most neighborhood residents along I-405 is noise. When noise analyses were completed for the Renton to Bellevue Project, WSDOT scheduled special noise meetings with neighborhoods.

To date, the project team has communicated with the following neighborhoods:

2003-2004:

- Kennydale in Renton
- North Renton in Renton

2005:

- Bellemont in Bellevue
- Kennydale (re-visit)
- North Renton (re-visit)
- Highbury Park in Renton
- Highlands in Renton
- Liberty Ridge in Renton
- Monterey Terrace in Renton
- Factoria in Bellevue
- Newport in Bellevue
- Somerset in Bellevue
- Neighborhoods in Newcastle

What special efforts have been made to reach minority, low-income, and non-English-speaking individuals?

By implementing a comprehensive outreach plan, the public involvement team conducted extensive outreach efforts to minority, low-income, and non-English-speaking populations in the Renton to Bellevue project area. The team contacted civic agencies and private organizations to identify and locate these communities and learn about their needs. The public involvement team contacted the following organizations in an effort to keep traditionally hard-to-reach communities informed of project plans and progress:

Agencies:

- Bellevue Multicultural Fair
- Bellevue World Impact Food Bank
- City of Bellevue Human Services
- City of Kent Housing and Human Services
- East King County Catholic Community Services
- Eastgate Health Clinic
- HopeLink
- King County Housing Authority
- Renton Clothing Bank
- Renton Food Bank

How WSDOT communicates with the public:

Speaker's Bureau – Formal presentations by WSDOT personnel to community organizations.

Environmental Outreach – Field studies put I-405 environmental team members in touch with neighbors. For example, WSDOT contacted agencies who provide services to low-income and minority populations to discuss the project and how it could affect their services.

Project Website – The I-405 Project Team Website, at www.wsdot.wa.gov/projects/I-405 is designed as a resource for the public, and has been updated regularly.

Newsletters/Project Updates – Newsletter mailings and email updates offer an ideal opportunity to inform the public on project progress.

Return Mail Postcard – Mailings included a return postcard offering an opportunity to comment on the project and to request a visit by I-405 Project Team members at organization meetings. Individual postcards were distributed to libraries, multi-family apartment/condominium associations, and special housing establishments.

- Renton Housing Authority
- Renton School District
- Renton Technical College
- Seattle Human Services
- South County YWCA
- South King County Family Services
- South King County Salvation Army
- St. Anthony's Catholic Church, Renton
- Ukrainian Community Center

Residential:

- Heritage Grove Apartments
- Royal Hill Apartments
- Summer Wind Community
- Sunset Terrace (RHA Property)

In the Renton to Bellevue project area, one of the primary concerns is the impact of construction. For example, most of the minority and low-income populations within the study area rely on transit facilities for daily needs such as education, employment, childcare, and healthcare, among others. Because of this reliance, these individuals must deal with delays and other challenges from the current inefficiencies of I-405. Additional effects on transit and interruptions in service on I-405 during construction are a big concern. Additional targeted outreach and the provision of alternative travel opportunities (such as increased bus or traffic demand management [TDM] options) may be necessary to ensure these populations will not be disproportionately affected from the construction activities.

In what other ways has the public been involved?

Several standing committees meet regularly to provide ongoing dialogue and coordination for the Renton to Bellevue Project. These groups include:

- Briefings with the Renton City Council, the Renton Transportation Committee, and the Mayor;
- Meetings with City of Bellevue staff to coordinate project activities;

- The I-405 Executive Committee, comprised of executives from FHWA, Federal Transit Administration (FTA), WSDOT, King County, and Sound Transit, as well as members of the Washington State Transportation Commission and elected officials from cities along the I-405 Corridor, provide input on policy matters; and
- The I-405 Steering Committee, comprised of senior staff from the local, regional, state, and federal agencies having jurisdiction within the Renton to Bellevue Project area, provides technical and policy guidance. The Steering Committee meets to provide feedback on technical feasibility, environmental acceptability, costs, and performance.

In addition to the outreach described above, the following outreach is being conducted throughout the duration of the project:

- A corridor-wide newsletter is distributed via email;
- A project brochure (or “folio”) tells the I-405 story, while fact sheets on frequently asked questions target specific areas of interest;
- Affected property owners are briefed throughout the project by one-on-one meetings, citizen group meetings;
- The media is informed through press releases and press kits, meetings with reporters, and editorial board briefings;
- A Renton to Bellevue Project website provides information on public involvement opportunities, funding, benefits, timeline, etc.; and
- A Speakers Bureau consisting of I-405 project team staff meets with civic organizations in the area to brief members on project progress and to answer questions.

How have government agencies been involved?

Government agencies have played major roles in the development of the Renton to Bellevue Project. WSDOT involves governmental agencies by conducting meetings to address issues on an as-needed basis. Examples of these methods are:

- Congressional and legislative briefings were conducted in 2004 and 2005. Washington State legislators within the I-405 Corridor study area and U.S. Congress members from the Washington State delegation received project updates;
- Scoping meetings with agencies to discuss traffic, air, noise, endangered species, water, wetlands, and mitigation strategies;
- Steering Committee meetings; and
- Regular meetings with the cities of Renton and Bellevue staffs.

How have we involved tribal governments in the project?

Tribal governments can help identify social issues and solutions that may affect tribal members or other social resources of interest to the tribes. WSDOT commits itself to respectful, effective consultation and communication with tribal governments in recognition that project activities may affect their rights and interests. WSDOT Executive Order E1025.00 on Tribal Consultation (February 19, 2003) established this commitment to an effective working relationship with tribal governments.

WSDOT initiated consultation with the following tribal governments during preparation of the I-405 Corridor Program EIS: Muckleshoot Tribe, Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, Snoqualmie Tribe, and Duwamish Tribe. The consultation continues as part of the Renton to Bellevue Project and will help to involve tribal governments in each stage of the environmental analysis. To date, tribal representative have participated in the Renton to Bellevue Project by attending project scoping meetings, site visits, participating in public outreach efforts, and meetings with WSDOT to discuss issues of interest.

What future public outreach is planned for the Renton to Bellevue Project?

An Open House was held on December 8, 2005, to share early findings from the environmental discipline reports. A public meeting and hearing on the EA will be held on March 22, 2006, at the Renton Senior Activity Center, 211 Burnett Avenue N, Renton, from 4 PM to 7 PM.